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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

MONDAY, MARCH 17, 2008

#### In Today's Papers

##### Closure Case Filed against Turkey's Ruling AKP

All media outlets reported over the weekend and today that on Friday, the Supreme Court of Appeals chief prosecutor filed a lawsuit asking the Constitutional Court to close the ruling AKP, on the grounds that the party "has become the focal point of anti-secular activities." In his indictment, chief prosecutor Abdurrahman Yalcinkaya also demanded the ban of 71 politicians, including Prime Minister Erdogan, President Abdullah Gul, and former Parliament Speaker Bulent Arinc and 11 AKP mayors, from politics. The indictment makes references to the AKP's "political Islam" party model, politically-oriented Islamist appointments to state offices and Islamist-oriented statements made by Erdogan and other AKP politicians. Monday papers report the AKP plans to move quickly to prepare a "mini-constitutional amendment package" which aims to decrease the intervention of the judiciary in democracy.

Under the banner headline, "Close the Nation, too," Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak criticizes the closure case as a move that "humiliates" Turkey. Under the headline, "Surprise Court Case against AKP," Islamist-oriented Zaman criticizes prosecutor Yalcinkaya for "creating evidence out of repudiated press reports" in filing the closure case against the AKP. Yeni Safak columnist Ali Bayramoglu writes on Sunday, "The AKP enjoys the support of one out of every two people in Turkey, which means the prosecutor has actually filed an appeal against democracy itself." On the other hand, mainstream Milliyet columnist Fikret Bila writes the AKP should consider the fact that a considerable part of the Turkish public was uneasy with some AKP implementations.

##### AKP and Other Parties' Reaction to Closure Case

All papers report Prime Minister Erdogan said, "Those who cast a shadow on Turkey's democratic reputation and endanger political and economic stability will suffer the consequences." "This unfortunate attempt has no legal grounds," Erdogan said, stressing, "We will not let our accomplishments and stability be harmed. Turkey will carry

on its path towards democracy, justice and development." President Abdullah Gul, in Dakar on a state visit, urged all to think about the consequences of such a lawsuit against a ruling party that enjoys a large majority in the parliament.

Mustafa Ozyurek, the deputy chairman of the main opposition CHP, said Friday it was "a misfortune for a ruling party to put itself in this situation." Ozyurek said, "But if a party has committed a crime, the chief prosecutor has to fulfill his duties." Opposition far right MHP chairman Devlet Bahceli said the closure case against the ruling party was "an unpleasant development for Turkish democracy," calling on everyone to "comply with the law and republic." Turkey's main Kurdish party DTP slammed the move as "an intervention in democracy." DTP lawmaker Hasip Kaplan said, "Political parties must come and go through elections. Turkey has been turned into a cemetery of political parties. Trying to close a party that has received 47 percent of the people's vote is illegal and an intervention in democratic society."

#### US and EU Reaction to AKP Closure Case

Weekend papers and today's Vatan, Turkiye, Sabah and others: Weekend papers report State Department spokesman Chase Beamer said, "We call on all concerned parties to respect democratic institutions and the rule of law. In democracies, electors decide on the country's future. The will of the voters should be respected." Weekend Sabah and Milliyet also mentioned that similar reaction came from DAS Bryza. Liberal Radikal reported remarks from former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright at the Brussels Forum.

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Albright said "I don't agree with the claims about weakening the secular structure of Turkey. People made a very clear choice during the last elections. I don't want to interfere in domestic affairs, but can we completely ignore the people's will?" Marc Grossman reportedly said "Turkey had an election last year. In democratic

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societies the result of the elections does matter. This case is definitely a surprise to me."

Today's mainstream Vatan quotes British Foreign Minister David Miliband saying "the closure case is against European democracy, it does not suit Europe's democratic standards and the principle of separation of judicial and political powers." Conservative-nationalist Turkiye quotes co-chairperson of the German Green Party Claudia Roth as saying "people from all classes voted for AK party. The Chief Public Prosecutor cannot neglect half of the society."

#### Editorial Commentary on AKP Closure Case

##### "The Indictment"

From leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet (3/17): "In the 21st century, Islamic geography still does not have democracy even though some countries in this geography operate with multi-party regimes, like Pakistan. Turkey remains the only exception and is the only democracy in Muslim geography. With the indictment against the AKP, we can conclude that the country as well as its regime is under serious threat. As far as outside threats are concerned, Turkey faces traps like Middle East Project (BMENA) and the Moderate Islam Project which are supported by outside forces. Only Turkey can save itself from traps and threats coming both from inside and outside by being conscious of how great the danger is against the only secular country in Islamic geography."

##### "Which AKP Faces Charges?"

Enis Berberoğlu of mainstream Hurriyet: "PM Erdogan has two different identities. On one side, he works for EU integration, globalization and democratization. On the other side, he makes strong anti-secular remarks and he prepares a new constitution for Turkey without seeking any popular consensus as if it is going to be an AKP manual. The latter identity, not the former, is definitely the reason for the court case. The AKP should not assume 46 % of the electorate preferred AKP for its Islamic fundamentalism, but rather for its projects on the EU, democratization and globalization."

#### "Closing AKP"

Melih Asik wrote in mainstream Milliyet (3/16): Germany closed down the Communist Party and Spain closed Batasuna and its affiliated parties 8 times. It is unlikely that the case against the AKP will end up with a ruling to close down the party. But the AKP should take a lesson from this process and be vigilant about secularism and democracy from now on. Even if a party garners 46 % electoral support, it does not give it the right to undermine democracy and to declare a fight against the judiciary."

#### Cheney Starts ME Tour with a Full List of Requests

Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak reports Vice-President Dick Cheney started his Middle East tour, which will include a stop in Turkey, yesterday. A high-level US official said "VP Cheney is going tell Turks that the US fully agrees with Turkey on PKK being a terrorist organization." The same official said "the visit to Oman, Saudi Arabia, Israel, West Bank and Turkey will be very interesting. Prior to the NATO summit, there will be a lot to talk about with Turkey regarding Afghanistan."

#### TV News:

CNN Turk

#### Domestic News

- The National Bar Association of Turkey released a statement in connection with the AKP closure lawsuit which called for restraint while the legal process continues.
- The Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association (TUSIAD)

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says banning political parties cannot help solve problems in democracies.

- Foreign Minister Ali Babacan said changes in article 301 of the penal code would be submitted to the parliament soon.

#### International News

- Kurdish regional administration leader Massoud Barzani said in Selahaddin that President Talabani's Turkey visit turned "a new page in relations," adding "misunderstandings between Turkey and our Kurdish region were lessened through this visit."
- Iraqi President Talabani joined ceremonies to mark the 20th anniversary of the Halabja massacre.

WILSON